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Edmonds, Richard
Hathaway

Self-reliance in southern
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SELF-RELIANCE IN
SOUTHERN EDUCATION

AN ADDRESS

Delivered at the Commencement of the Virginia
Polytechnic Institute, Blacksburg,
June 15th, 1904

By

RICHARD H. EDMONDS

Editor Manufacturers' Record
Baltimore

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Self-Reliance in Southern Education.

By RICHARD H. EDMONDS.

11-20
MAY 12 1946
In the military and naval world West Point and Annapolis stand for trained leadership; in the industrial world the technical school stands for the same. To the South at least, if not to the whole world, the trained captain of industry is of far greater value than the trained military officer. The latter is but the servant of the former, for in its broad sense commerce is the world's dominant power, and in the future its victories are to be won more by the arts of peace than by the terrors of war; more by the skill of the engineer and the chemist than by the skill—I had almost said by the kill—of the soldier.

Our naval authorities are watching with keen interest the brilliant work of several of the Japanese officers because they were educated in this country. But the professors of this school, as of every similar institution, have more reason for taking pride in the work of their graduates than the naval authorities of Annapolis have in the success of the officers trained there. The teachers here are training men for the real work of mankind; they are training them to conquer nature, and out of nature's resources to create blessings untold for the comfort and happiness of man and the good of the world. The field for this work is unlimited. We have scarcely commenced. In agriculture, in industrial pursuits, in chemistry, in electricity, every discovery made but broadens our horizon and helps us to catch a glimpse of the universe of opportunity which awaits man's control. A little insect which is destroying \$50,000,000 worth of cotton a year, and which may threaten our world-wide cotton supremacy, has baffled all our scientists. The man who battles with this enemy and conquers it will gain a greater victory for his country than the army and navy can ever win. The man who teaches us how to preserve our forests against the invasion of the woodman who spares no tree; the man who opens up the arid regions of the West by

scientific irrigation; the man who broadens the diversification of the South's crops; the man who shall lead our national government to spend upon the improvement of our rivers and harbors a tithe of what we spend upon the army and navy and pensions; the man who teaches us how to control the rush of the mighty Mississippi and its tributaries, that they may no longer carry destruction in their overflows—he is the man whom we in the future shall delight to honor. In this school you have been fitting yourselves for such work. You enter upon the stage of life at a time when progress in science, in industry and in agriculture is opening before us a field for honor and profit for the trained expert such as man never dreamed of in the past. More to be envied than the richest man or the mightiest ruler of earth is the technically-educated boy of today. He can reasonably look forward to 40 or 50 years of life. Would you measure the possibilities before him in that time? Then study the record of the last half-century. You will find that nearly all that has been accomplished in the creation of manufactures, in the building of railroads, in the opening of coal mines, in the utilization of electricity for light and power, in the telegraph, the telephone, and latest, but not last, in wireless telegraphy, has been wrought in that period. The progress of the half-century measured by these things has been so rapid, so marvelous, that we are overwhelmed with amazement. But of the coming years we have a right to demand still greater things. What they shall be we can no more forecast than we could 50 years ago have foreseen the wireless message which speeds across land or sea. The coming years belong to the boys of today. They shall see advancement in science, in industry, in agriculture greater than that of the nineteenth century, wonderful as is the story of all that it recorded in human affairs.

It has been said that "the world reserves its big prizes for but one thing, and that is initiative." The same writer defines initiative as "doing the right thing without being told." But something more than initiative is needed, and that is self-reliance, self-respect, backbone. This is true of a country as well as of an individual. One of the humorists of the day says there will soon be but two classes of people in this country—those who ride in automobiles and those who dodge automobiles; but the real designation of the

two classes into which the world always has been and always will be divided is burden-bearers and burden-shirkers. On one side are those who have both initiative and self-reliance, on the other side are those who have neither. Those of one class create, they bring things to pass, they carry the burdens of others as well as their own, and in doing this they strengthen and develop every latent power; those of the other class lack initiative, lack self-reliance, lack backbone, and throw upon others every burden which they should carry. In doing this they steadily lessen their own virility. The unused faculty atrophies and dies. Your future will depend upon the development of your initiative faculties, of your self-reliance and of your burden-bearing abilities. Rest assured that if you look to others to do for you the things which you should do for yourself, if you look to others to bear your burdens and responsibilities, if you look to others for initiative, you will never measure up to your opportunity, and to all intents and purposes your life will be a failure. This school, as I understand its work, stands for self-reliance—self-reliance in the boy who works his way through college, as well as self-reliance in doing its own work, preferring, if need be, to build slowly rather than to be known as a seeker after alms from outside. It prefers to bear its own burdens rather than ask others to bear them. On the same ground I am opposed to the system of begging donations from the rich men of the country for Southern education. Moreover, the South is abundantly able to educate its own people, and the education which it will get in initiating and developing its own educational facilities, in bearing its own burdens, will alone be worth more than would be all the uncounted millions even, if ever received, of which we have heard so much of late years as promised to Southern education, but which so far have not materialized. The South has the wealth of brain and money to develop its own educational system, but unless it develops its own initiative, its own self-reliance in this work, if it looks to others to initiate for it, to bear its burdens, then just so surely as the sun shall rise tomorrow will it become a burden-shirker, mentally, ethically and financially. With its own inherent powers, its initiative, its self-reliance—not fully developed, it may be, but capable of the broadest development—gradually fading away, we shall see planted in

the very beginning of educational and national life, even in the boy and girl in the primary school, the seed of a deadly poison that the South can do nothing of itself, that its educational work can only be advanced by the incoming of philanthropists from other sections or by national aid. Taught to shirk our duties, taught to cast on others our responsibilities, we shall become a people lacking in initiative, lacking in self-reliance, lacking in backbone, lacking in burden-bearing qualities, and then shall we as a people seek to shift to other shoulders the burden of doing our whole duty in the education of whites and blacks.

I said the South is abundantly able to do its own educational work. This is true, and dependence upon outside suggestions or help will not only be fatal to our self-respect and to our self-reliance, but fatal to our own material advancement; for, growing weaker under such a policy instead of stronger, we shall become the hewers of wood and the drawers of water for those who shall come in and possess the land. It is time to stop crying poverty; it is time to realize what we have and to utilize our wealth for all our needs; it is time to stop being pessimistic. The pessimist has been described as a man who, having the choice of two evils, prefers to take them both, and this is what many Southern people have been doing. Too long have we been pessimists. The wealth of the South today with its population of 25,000,000 is equal to the wealth of the United States with its 31,000,000 in 1860. The South is now mining six times as much bituminous coal as the United States mined in 1860, it is making six times as much pig-iron, its output of oil is eighty times as great as that of the whole country then, its lumber output is more than double, its railroad mileage is twice as great, and its total wealth is over \$16,000,000,000, against \$16,100,000,000 for the whole country in 1860. I have no word of criticism against the good intentions of many of the kindly-hearted Northern philanthropists who are furnishing the money for an educational propaganda in the South. Many of them mean well, but so may the captain, who, ignorant of the coast and without chart or compass, drives his ship to wreck upon the rocks. Good intentions are no proof against fatal blunders. The way to the lower world is said to be paved with good intentions. Even a clear conscience is no assur-

ance of rightdoing, for conscience may not have been rightly educated. But it is not against these outside philanthropists that I would so much utter a warning as against ourselves; it is against our fatal mistake should we look to others for initiative and guidance and financial help in our educational problems that I would raise a warning voice.

If the South of the future is to be worthy of the glorious record of the Old South, it must be the strongest, the most self-reliant country of the world; it must be a leader, an initiator, not a follower; it must be a burden-bearer, not a burden-shirker. Its men must be real men—men who think for themselves, men of broad views and men of backbone. We hear so much about the New South that we have forgotten to study the Old South. We accept the teachings of others that the Old South was a land lacking in men of affairs, that it was a land of indolence and without mighty leaders except in politics. So long have we heard these things that we almost believe them, and the world fully believes them. Even our own orators sometimes tell us the same story, seeming not to know that in the early days the South led in manufactures, that its pioneer iron men were scattered all over this mountain region from Virginia through the Carolinas to Kentucky and Tennessee. We have forgotten that the first steamboat which crossed the Atlantic sailed from a Southern port; that the first locomotive built in this country was for a Southern railroad; that the first 100-mile railroad in the United States was in the South; that between 1850 and 1860 the South built nearly twice as many miles of railroad as the New England and Middle States combined; that in 1860 New Orleans claimed, probably correctly, to rank as the leading port of the world in proportion to population; we have forgotten that the creation between 1800 and 1860 of a cotton industry which had become the dominant factor in the world's commerce required energy and enterprise and broad business ability greater than were needed to develop the manufacturing interests of New England. The South was so busy planning and doing great things for commercial and industrial expansion, as well as for national expansion, that it left to others the writing of its history. We of this generation have been recreant to our trust in that we have failed to do honor to the

memory of the giants in business in the Old South. The men who led in business, in industry, in science, in broad plans of development were in their sphere fully as great as the statesmen and the warriors of whom we boast. Until we understand the Old South and the stuff of which its people were made we shall never be able to fully measure the possibilities of the New South. Not until then shall we see that instead of progress we have in self-reliance retrograded. In the study of the lives of the business men of the Old South—the men of the farm, the bank, the counting-room, the factory, the railroad—we should catch new inspiration. The New South is new in name only. It is not a new country or a new people; it is but a revival of the Old South. We are but taking up the work so rudely interrupted by the war. Though the South's progress since 1880 has been relatively greater than that of the whole country, all that we have accomplished does not measure up to the work of antebellum days. Study the records of the past, know your country, and you will then appreciate as never before the business leaders of olden times. In this study you will learn that there is scarcely an important railroad in the South that was not planned before 1860. Study the great industrial conventions over which men such as John C. Calhoun presided, and you will understand the broad grasp of affairs of the men of those days. Last November there was held in New Orleans a Mississippi River Levee Convention. It was heralded as the most representative convention which had ever met to discuss the improvement of the Mississippi and its tributaries. Over 20 States were represented. Twenty-eight hundred delegates were reported as having been appointed. Governors, senators, bankers, lawyers, merchants, manufacturers, planters were there, and for two days the convention listened to brilliant speeches and able arguments in favor of national control of the improvement of the Mississippi river. John Sharp Williams undertook to prove why he, as a strict Constitution constructionist, could favor national control of this work. Others argued the question as though it were a new problem, and sought to prove that democrats, as radical as it might seem, as well as republicans, could advocate such a measure. Then the convention passed strong resolutions in behalf of government control of this work, and this was by many

heralded as an advance step by the South. But delve into Southern history and you will find a story probably not known to a single officer of that convention, possibly not to a single delegate, of a still more representative Mississippi River Convention held in Memphis in 1845, presided over by John C. Calhoun, whose speech showing why the improvement of the Mississippi river should be made by the national government, if read in New Orleans, would have made John Sharp Williams' unnecessary. Resolutions passed at that convention were just as strong and advanced as those passed at New Orleans nearly 60 years later. Study the Old South and you will find that the importance of industrial development was recognized as fully then as now; you will find that from 1845 to 1860 the spirit of the South was represented by an industrial journal more ably edited than any industrial publication either in the North or in the South today. Despite the curse of slavery, which enslaved the white man's power, while, in part at least, it civilized and Christianized millions of blacks fresh from the barbarism of Africa, the South, through cotton having conquered the commerce of the world, commenced between 1840 and 1850 to again bend its energies, as prior to 1820, to industrial pursuits. Study the Old South and you will learn that the coal and iron about which we justly boast were well known and their value fully appreciated. A few days ago a leading New York daily, in discussing the South's present industrial growth as illustrated by a particular section, as though it were an entirely new thing, said:

"It is a pioneer region not because it is poor and worthless, but because the old enterprise of the South was not directed to its sources of wealth. As the Old South left untouched the coal and iron measures of Birmingham, so it left unimproved the equally rich hills below the Alabama and Mississippi black belt. Now progressive men have discovered the possibilities of both sections and are rapidly transforming them."

This is but an expression of general opinion, and yet far back of the days of the Revolution the South was an active ironmaker. George Washington's father was engaged in mining and shipping iron ore; Jefferson carried on nail works; a leading South Carolina planter led in building furnaces, rolling mills, foundries and machine shops in that State, where as early as 1830 cannon and

small guns were made. Alabama had its furnaces and rolling mills, and the highest grade of charcoal iron made in the United States is produced in a plant which is but a continuation on the same spot of one operated in 1840. That Birmingham was not developed as an iron center prior to the war is not more surprising than that the vast wealth of Mesaba ores, which have made Pittsburg the steel center of the world, was not utilized until about 15 years ago. Study the Old South and you will learn that some of the best geological reports of Southern States were made before 1860; you will learn that so well did the Old South understand the meaning of the steam engine to the world that it named its first locomotive, the first ever built for an American road, "The Best Friend." In this name it indicated its appreciation of the fact that the locomotive marked the beginning of a revolution in human affairs, and that the South proposed to be in the van in the fullest utilization of this new and mighty force. But thereby hangs a tale. The fireman of this engine, so the story goes, was a negro. Disturbed by the noise of escaping steam, he sat on the safety-valve. Amid the wreck and ruin of the engine he ceased to exist. This disaster but typified the great disaster of 1861, when the negro again sat on the safety-valve, put there by the interference of others. Again wreck and ruin followed. The explosion shook the foundations of civil liberty, destroyed the accumulated wealth of the South, almost destroyed Southern civilization itself, and left this section in desolation as complete as that of "The Pest Friend" when its ruins covered the ground. But as "The Best Friend," pieced and patched here and there, was rebuilt and named "The Phoenix," so, rallying from the shock of 1861-65, the people of the South reconstructed the engine of Southern material advancement. For many weary years it looked like the task was hopeless, but after we had settled the evils of reconstruction days and the white people of this section had regained control of their State governments, then, practically unaided and alone, the South built its engine of progress, which for 20 years has been running at a speed greater than that of any other section. Planned by the leaders in technical and industrial work of the South, built of Southern iron, its fires fed with Southern oil and coal, manned by the experts trained in Southern schools, it is carrying Southern competition in cotton

goods, in lumber, in coal, in iron, in oil and in agricultural products into the markets of the world. Once more the train of Southern progress, manned by the ablest engineers and conductors, is speeding on to the goal of world-wide commercial and industrial supremacy. Does that statement seem too strong? If so, consider it for a moment.

Nature has bestowed its richest blessings upon this section. It has burdened our mountains with coal and iron and marbles and granites; it has covered our hillsides and our valleys with one-half of the standing timber of the United States; it has given us oil and phosphates and every variety of soil; it has given us a monopoly of the cotton production of the world, and what this alone means few have appreciated. Here it has united the foundations of practically all manufacturing, with agricultural capabilities sufficient to enable the farmers of the South, as this section becomes more thickly settled and better cultivated, to produce more than the entire agricultural output of the United States at present.

Amid the wreck and ruin of that disastrous explosion of 1861 was born a New South. It is but a child of the Old. Inheriting the same strength of character which gave to the Old South its pre-eminence in agriculture, in science, in statesmanship and war, and which gave to its soldiers the strength to face the long and unequal contest of 1861-65, this child of the Old South has met every emergency. It faced problems such as no other people ever had to confront; it had to meet defeat and poverty, misrepresentation, misgovernment; it had to meet the supreme question of Anglo-Saxon civilization and settle whether the white man or the negro should rule this Southern country; it had to stand the drain not simply of its enormous money loss, but the still greater drain of hundreds of thousands killed or made permanent invalids on the battlefield; it had to stand the loss of other hundreds of thousands who, discouraged by their environment, sought opportunity for employment in the West, on the Pacific coast and in the North. Today 1,500,000 Southern-born whites are living in other sections and helping to give virility to the greatest railroad, financial and business organizations of America, while the South has only 750,000 born elsewhere. All of these problems and these heavy drafts upon its vitality the South has met and conquered. The heroism

of the battlefield was not greater than the heroism which won victory against these overwhelming odds. But this victory was due not to the men of the South alone. It was the heroic courage of the women which made possible the long struggle of 1861-65; but their courage then was not greater than that with which these same women met the struggle after 1865. The men in gray, ragged and tattered, footsore and weary, with many a meal represented only by an extra reef in the belt that at least the aching void might be compressed into a smaller space, caught their courage from the glorious inspiration of the women of the South. Great was the heroism of the women who gave to the Confederate soldier the power to stand the four years of bitter contest, but equally as great was the heroism of the same women who met the weary, broken-hearted, returning soldier and breathed into him the breath of new life and new hope.

Your part in the South's progress, in the honor and wealth which it offers to every earnest, honest, trained worker, whether he be native-born or whether he comes from the North or the West or from foreign lands, rests with you. I would that it were in my power to paint for you a picture of the future of the South that you might see something of the possibilities which this section offers to every man of character and ability. The task is too great; I cannot do it. But, standing beside you on the mountain-top and pointing to the territory which stretches from the Potomac to the Rio Grande, bordered on one side by a mountain range bursting with mineral wealth, a mountain range the beauty and grandeur of whose scenery is nowhere surpassed, and bordered on the other side by the Atlantic and the Gulf, I can tell you that scientists say in this region is many times as much coal as Great Britain ever had before it mined a ton; that in this region there is more iron than all Europe possesses; that in this same region stands one-half of the timber of the United States; here also is found the richest oil territory known; here centers a monopoly of the world's cotton production, and here is the predestined center of cotton-manufacturing as well; here are found wheat and corn and rice and sugar; here fruits of all varieties reach their most perfect development; here is found a uniform rainfall, with a climate ranging from the cold of the high mountains of Virginia and Carolina to the warmth

of the far South, where flowers ever blossom beneath a winter sun. And when I have told you that these are by no means the sum of all the blessings so bounteously given by nature to this favored section, I still cannot attempt to paint for you a picture of the South's future. You must do that for yourself. Give free rein to your own imagination and let it paint the picture for you. It will paint you a picture of a land flowing with milk and honey, of a land where straggling villages have become prosperous towns, where towns have grown to bustling centers of wealth, of art and of science; it will paint you a picture of a happy and prosperous farm life, where good roads, the electric car and the telephone have banished the loneliness of country life; it will paint you a picture of increasing wealth making possible increasing educational advancement, and where schools and churches dot the landscape o'er. But while your imagination is painting this picture of material advancement, remember that "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he," and bid it paint as a background to its picture of material prosperity a people who, whether "to the manner born" or whether they have come by choice rather than by the accident of birth, shall emulate the virtues, domestic and public, the manliness, the self-reliance, the charms of the women and the honor of the men which have forever hallowed the memory of the Old South.

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